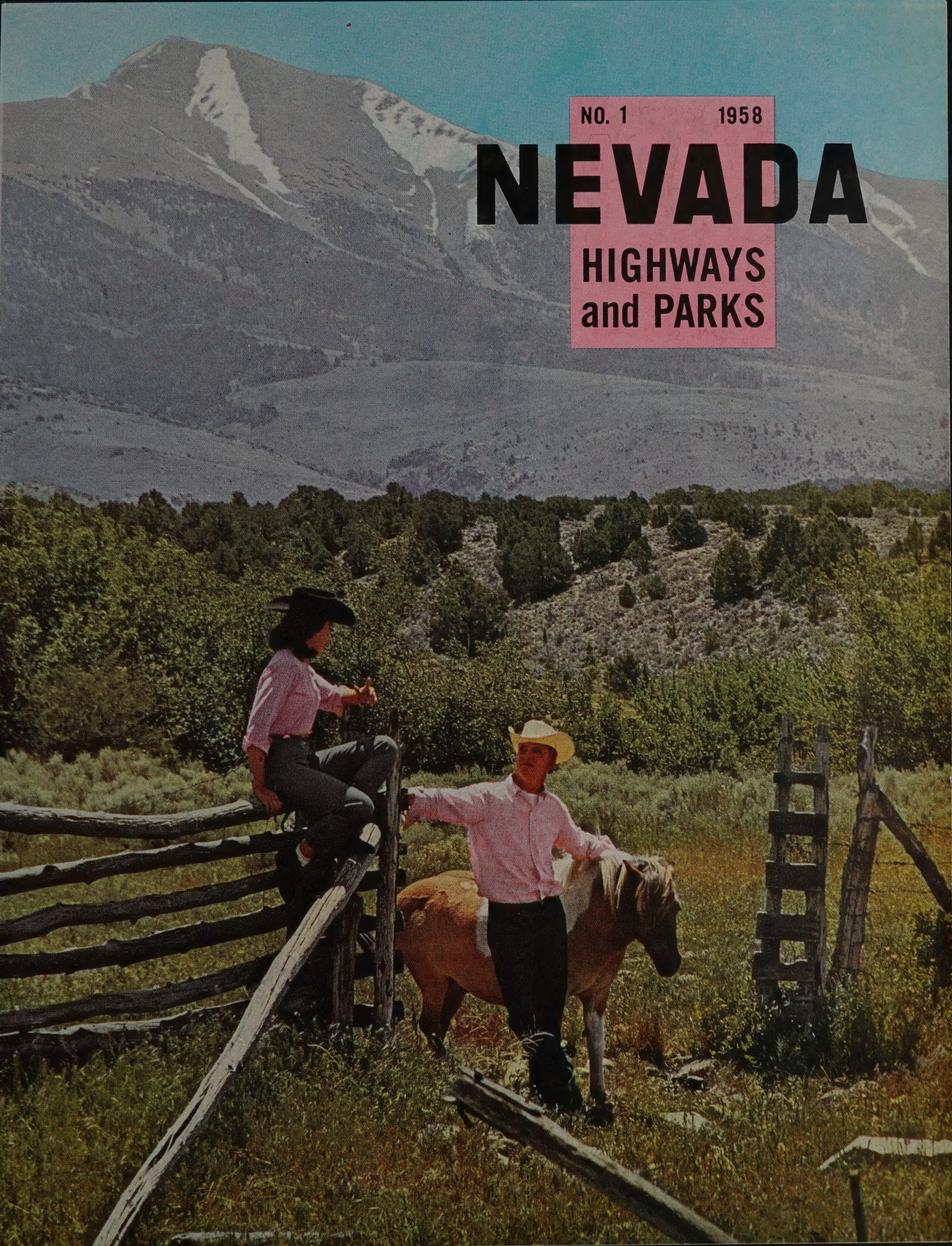

NO. 1 1958

NEVADA
HIGHWAYS and PARKS

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NEVADA
HIGHWAYS
and PARKS

VOL. XVIII

Published by the
NEVADA
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS
Carson City, Nevada

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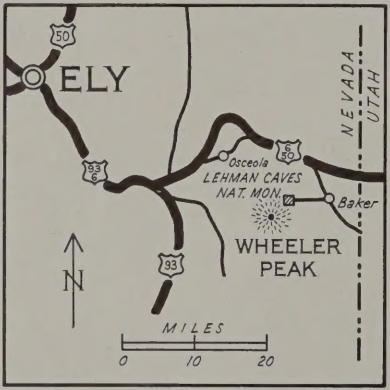
NEVADA HIGHWAYS AND PARKS *is published several times annually and may be obtained free of charge from the Nevada State Department of Highways, Carson City. Printed by the State Printing Office, Carson City, Nevada, Jack McCarthy, State Printer.*



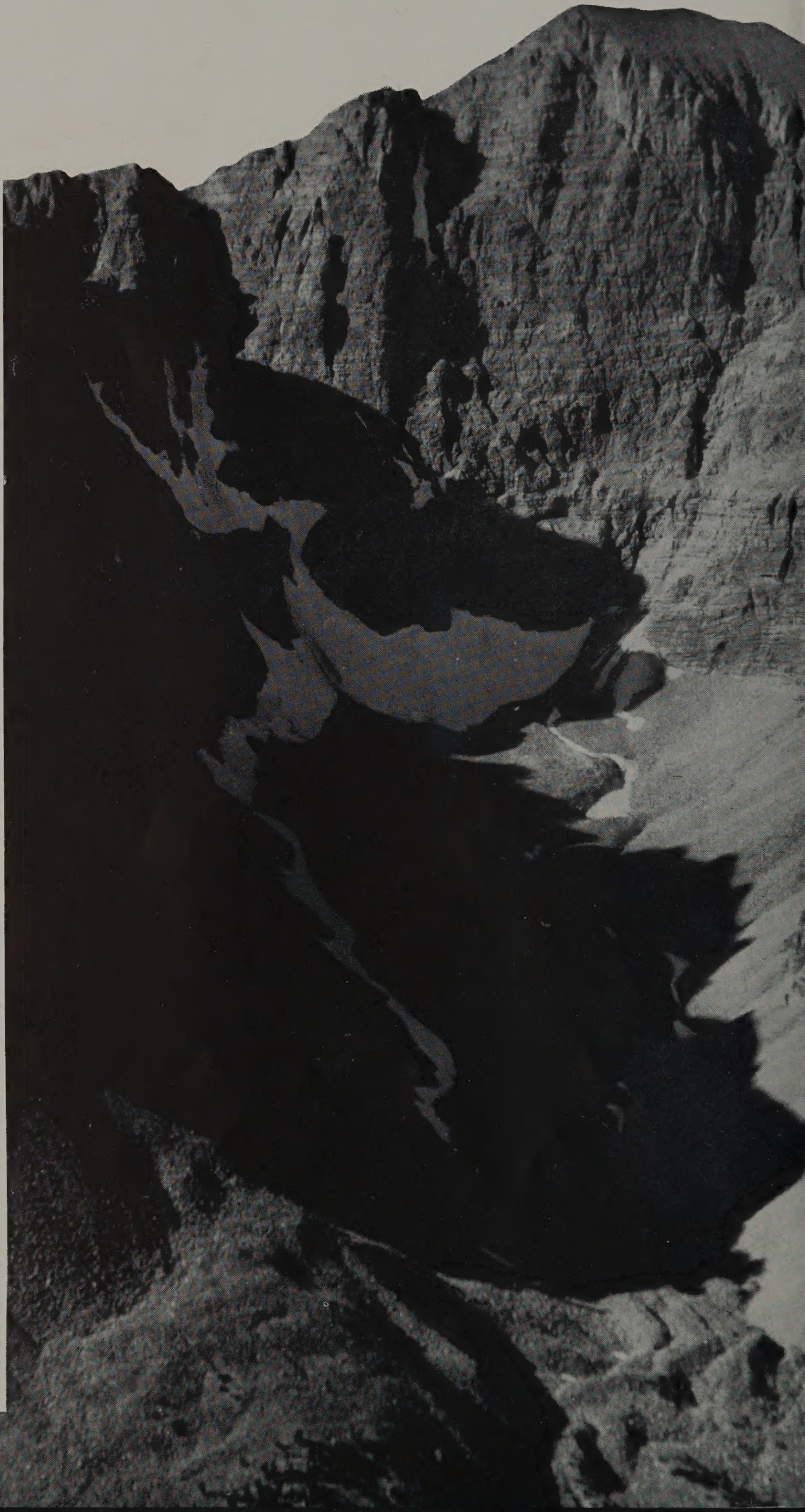
FRED G. GREULICH
1885-1957

Regretfully, we announce the death in Reno last December of Fred G. Greulich, long-time editor of this magazine.

From his first issue in 1935 until he retired in 1956, Mr. Greulich worked tirelessly to improve the magazine and sent it out to a constantly growing readership now numbering several hundred thousand.

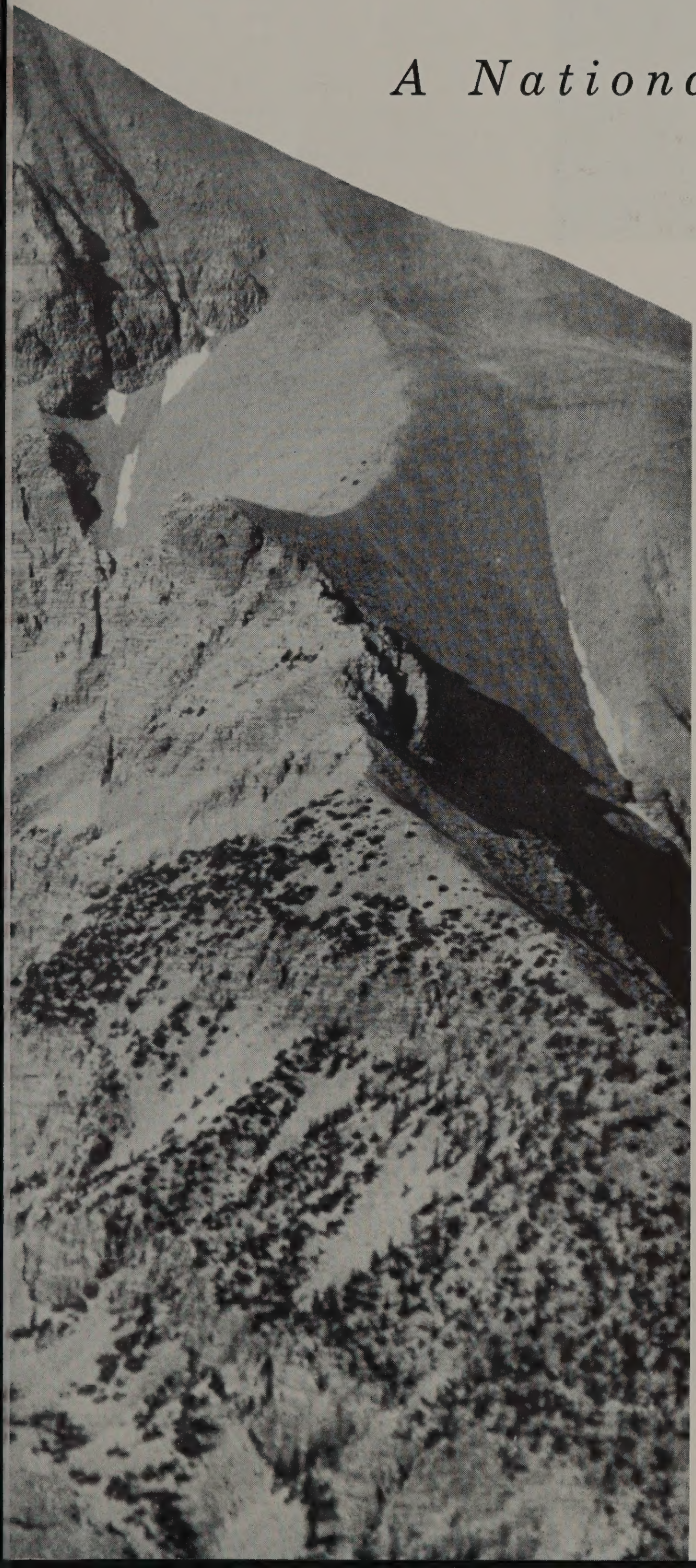
He will be remembered by his readers and many friends as a skillful editor, writer and devoted resident of Nevada.

WHEELER



PEAK
and its Glacier

A National Park for Nevada?



By Weldon F. Heald
Photos by Irwin Fehr

One of the fundamental policies of the Park Service is that each unit within the system should exemplify a definite type of scenery and, where possible, every park should be the finest of its kind. So theoretically each of our national parks is different from the others and all are supreme examples of America's originally rich and diversified wilderness. There remain, however, a number of highly individual and significant types not now adequately represented. One of them is the Basin-and-Range topography typical of the vast desert region between the Rockies and California's Sierra Nevada. Here are some two hundred separate ranges alternating with wide, arid, treeless valleys. These mountains are so distinctive and important geographically, geologically, botanically, zoologically and climatically that they have become widely known as "Basin Ranges" or "Great Basin Ranges." Yet in spite of their superior scenic, recreational and scientific attractions, no national park or monument has been specifically set aside to preserve the type. Thus, there exists a characteristic kind of Western scenery, now lacking in the park system, that should be added while there is still time.

The number-one candidate to fill the gap is the Snake Range. Situated in east-central Nevada, just west of the Utah line, it is unquestionably the finest of all the Great Basin ranges. Stretching north and south for 80 miles, and 10 to 15 miles wide, the Snake Range towers abruptly 6,000 to 8,000 feet above desert valleys to the east and west, and culminates in Wheeler Peak, Nevada's second highest point, 13,063 feet above sea level. Geologists say that this huge mountain mass is a typical fault block range, consisting of a vast arch of ancient quartzite thousands of feet thick. Here and there are granite intrusions, and limestone

View from the slopes of Wheeler Peak extends miles across the valley below.

flanks the lower slopes on both sides. Like many fault blocks, the Snake Range is tilted so that the crest rises in a steep escarpment on the west, while the more gradual eastern side has been eroded into a series of transverse ridges separated by deep canyons.

From base to summit are five of North America's seven Life Zones. These range from Upper Sonoran to Arctic-Alpine, and in an airline distance of five miles on the precipitous west slope are all the climatic and vegetational changes one would encounter on a 2,600-mile journey to northern Alaska. This telescoping of desert, forest, and mountain climates within the space of a few miles is a characteristic of the Great Basin ranges, but nowhere is it more dramatically displayed than here. As yet, little disturbed by man, the area is a natural zoo, aviary, and botanical garden where animals, birds, plants, and flowers of the Southwestern deserts, Pacific Coast, and Rocky Mountains meet and mingle with rare varieties found only locally. Little study has been given to the scrambled ecologies of the Snake Range, but it would make a fascinating field for those interested in wildlife, birds, plants, or flowers.

But most remarkable is the surprising oasis of superlative alpine scenery perched high above the desert. At the heads of east-side canyons is a series of glacial basins cradled among rugged, snow-striped peaks, the whole resembling a piece of the Colorado Rockies dropped in arid Nevada by mistake. It is an exhilarating sky island of spruce forests and aspen groves, green, flower-spread meadows, jewel-like lakes, and cascading streams. The area, too, shows outstanding examples of glacial topography. Ancient glaciers have gnawed out huge rock-walled cirques in the north and east faces of the summit ridges and sculptured the canyons almost to their lower ends. They also left relatively fresh moraines on the floors of the basins. A few permanent ice-fields still persist and on Wheeler Peak lies the only living glacier in the entire Great Basin region, east of the High Sierra rim.

This alpine country, covering an area of approximately 30 square miles, is too rough and restricted for extensive road and resort development, and it makes an ideal wilderness playground for camping, hiking, climbing, fishing, and exploring. Although little known and seldom visited, it impresses everyone who goes there as profoundly as it did Albert Marshall and me. So there is a small but growing group of Wheeler Peak enthusiasts that sincerely believes some hundred square miles, containing Lehman Caves, the finest east-side canyons, the superb alpine section, and the spectacular western escarpment, would make a unique and significant addition to the national park system.

Lehman Caves is 62 miles east of the copper-mining town of Ely, and is reached by paved U. S. Highway 6, which crosses the Snake Range through the broad gap of Sacramento Pass, 7,159 feet altitude. East of the mountains hard-surfaced State 73 branches south to Baker five miles. This little ranching center is situated at 5,650 feet elevation on the edge of broad Snake Valley, with the snow-flecked summits of Wheeler Peak and its satellites soaring grandly to the west. Here are cabins, general store, restaurant, and gas station. The Snake Range is included in a detached section of Nevada National Forest, and at the Baker Ranger Station maps

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WELDON F. HEALD has more than earned his reputation as an expert on mountains. He has explored most of the ranges in the West and is nationally known for his articles on natural science and conservation which have appeared in more than a dozen publications of wide circulation. In company with Albert Marshall, Mr. Heald spent five days exploring Wheeler Peak in 1955.

To him must go the credit for discovering Wheeler Peak's glacier and for first proposing the idea that the glacier and surrounding mountain area be incorporated into the national park system. The idea caught on immediately and, thanks to Mr. Heald's continuing efforts, the area now stands an excellent chance of becoming Nevada's first national park — the Great Basin Range National Park.

To help promote the project, the Great Basin Range National Park Association was formed in 1957 and is accepting memberships from anyone interested in helping the nation to gain another much-needed park. The $3 membership fee should be directed to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Association, Glenn C. Osborne, Box 248, Garrison, Utah.

Mr. Heald's article in this issue is reprinted by special permission of the editors from PACIFIC DISCOVERY *where it first appeared two years ago.*

Pictures of the Wheeler Peak area, including cover and center pages, were taken by Irwin Fehr of Ely.

and information may be obtained. From the town a paved spur road heads directly for the mountains, gradually ascending Lehman Creek, six miles, to Lehman Caves National Monument. The road ends at headquarters, pleasantly located at an elevation of 7,000 feet among pinyons and junipers on the lower slopes of the range. Nearby is picnic ground, and cabin accommodations are available.

The monument, covering one square mile, was created in 1922 to preserve a singularly beautiful series of underground limestone chambers and corridors, discovered by pioneer Absolom Lehman in the 1870's. Some speleologists even considered them the finest to be found in the West, and many people believe they are the most beautiful in the country.

The monument lies between two east-side canyons, which lead up to the high country around Wheeler Peak. In both are Forest Service campgrounds reached by fair dirt roads. Lehman Creek canyon, to the north, is the most popular approach and the campground, three miles from the monument, at an elevation of 8,000 feet, is the starting point of the eight-mile Wheeler Peak trail.

A more delightful and varied hike it would be hard to find. The route ascends beside foaming Lehman Creek, passing through aspen groves, alternating with shady woods of white and Douglas firs, and grassy openings bright with wildflowers. Now and then the trail loops up sunny slopes of pinyon, manzanita and mountain mahogany: Some of the last are giants of their race, forty feet high, with trunks more than a foot in diameter. At four miles the high glacial basin is reached and the scenery becomes alpine. Here, the precipitous north face of Wheeler Peak rises impressively 4,000 feet above green meadows, bordered by tall pointed Englemann spruce. On the rocky rims above are fine stands of bristlecone pines, and the aspens go to timberline, where they form extensive mat-like thickets not more than a foot high.

At Stella Lake, largest of the three moraine lakes at the head of Lehman Creek, the trail tackles the headwall and surmounts the divide. Beyond the last wind-whipped spruces and limber pines, it follows the bleak arctic ridge upward to the steep summit cone. On both sides the slopes plunge down to the desert, thousands of

A corner of the green, alpine country below Wheeler Peak which is not difficult to reach by horseback or on foot.

feet below, and range after range of mountains recede to the distant horizon. But even here miniature alpine gardens bloom amidst the waste of rocks and brighten the way almost to the top. From the wedge-shaped summit of Wheeler Peak is a 360-degree panorama embracing thousands of square miles of deserts, hills, valleys, and mountains in eastern Nevada and western Utah. But perhaps most impressive is the closeup of peaks, ridges, basins and canyons of the Snake Range itself, stretching southward in jumbled confusion.

Strangely enough, the glacier cannot be seen from the Lehman Creek basin nor even from the summit. Although the jagged rim and sheer rock walls of the great north cirque are the most prominent features of the landscape, the floor remains persistently hidden from all points outside. That is undoubtedly why the glacier wasn't discovered until 1955. The cirque must actually be entered to see it, and there is no reason to suppose that anyone had done so before then.

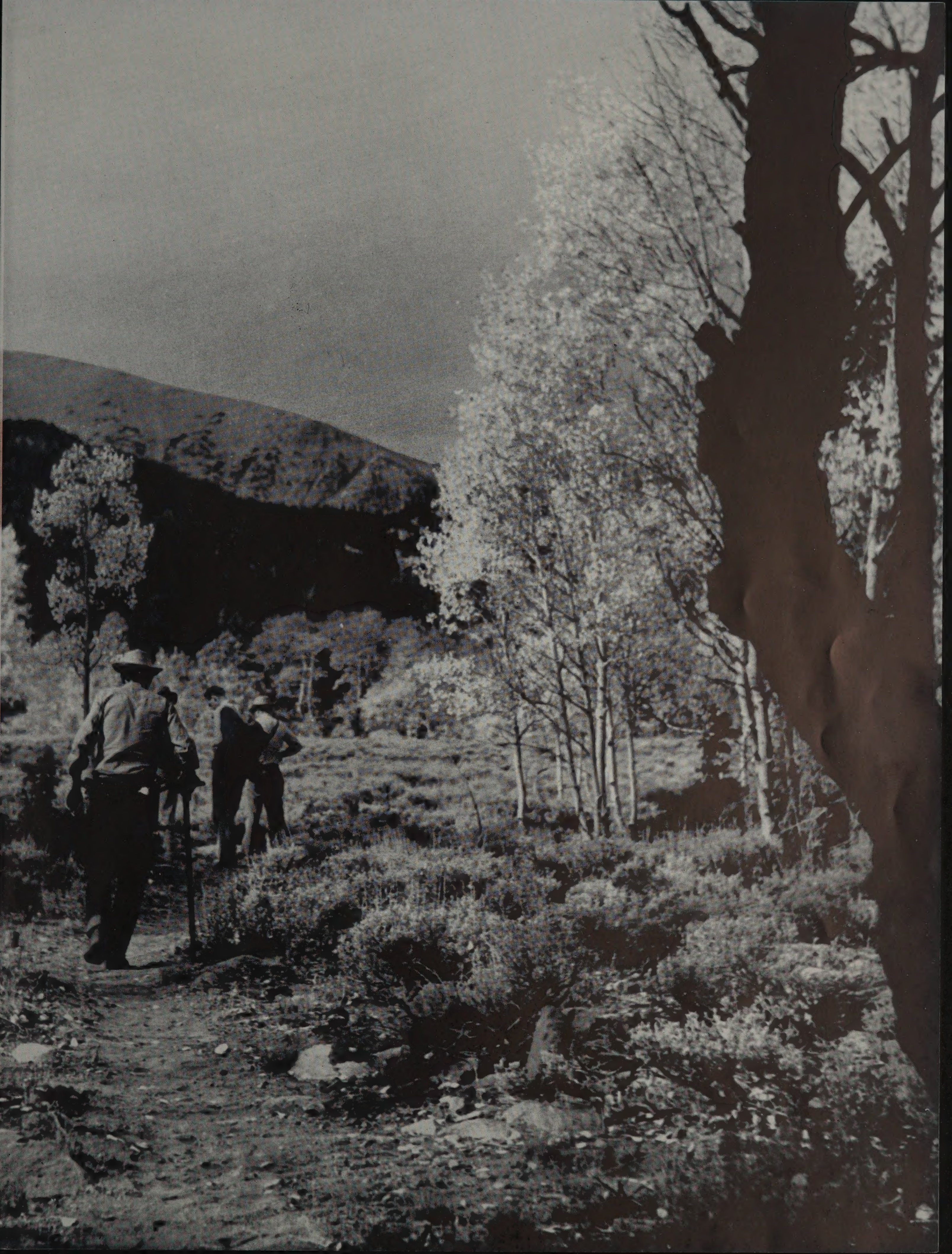
My curiosity was first aroused some years ago by an article in an old United States Geological Survey annual report, which described a body of ice seen on Wheeler Peak in 1883. But it gave few details, and no intimation that it might be an active glacier. My interest was further stimulated by an examination of air photographs, and a distant view of Wheeler Peak's north face while crossing Sacramento Pass in 1947. Time didn't permit investigation then, but I felt certain that some of the ice remained and resolved to have a closer look at the earliest opportunity.

Eight years passed before I was able to satisfy my curiosity. But finally last September, Albert Marshall, companion on many previous mountain jaunts, joined me and we spent several days exploring the high country, climbed Wheeler Peak and descended the north face far enough to see ice, and eventually made our way into the great north cirque. When we laboriously passed the portal-like cliffs and looked into the depths beyond, we both shouted at once. For there, cradled in the gigantic rock basin, was not just merely ice, but an active glacier. All the signs of moving ice were readily apparent—bergschrunds, crevasses, and fresh moraines. True, this was no giant river of ice we had found—triangular in shape, its greatest dimension probably does not exceed 2,000 feet—but the wonder is that it is still there at all in the midst of the Nevada desert.

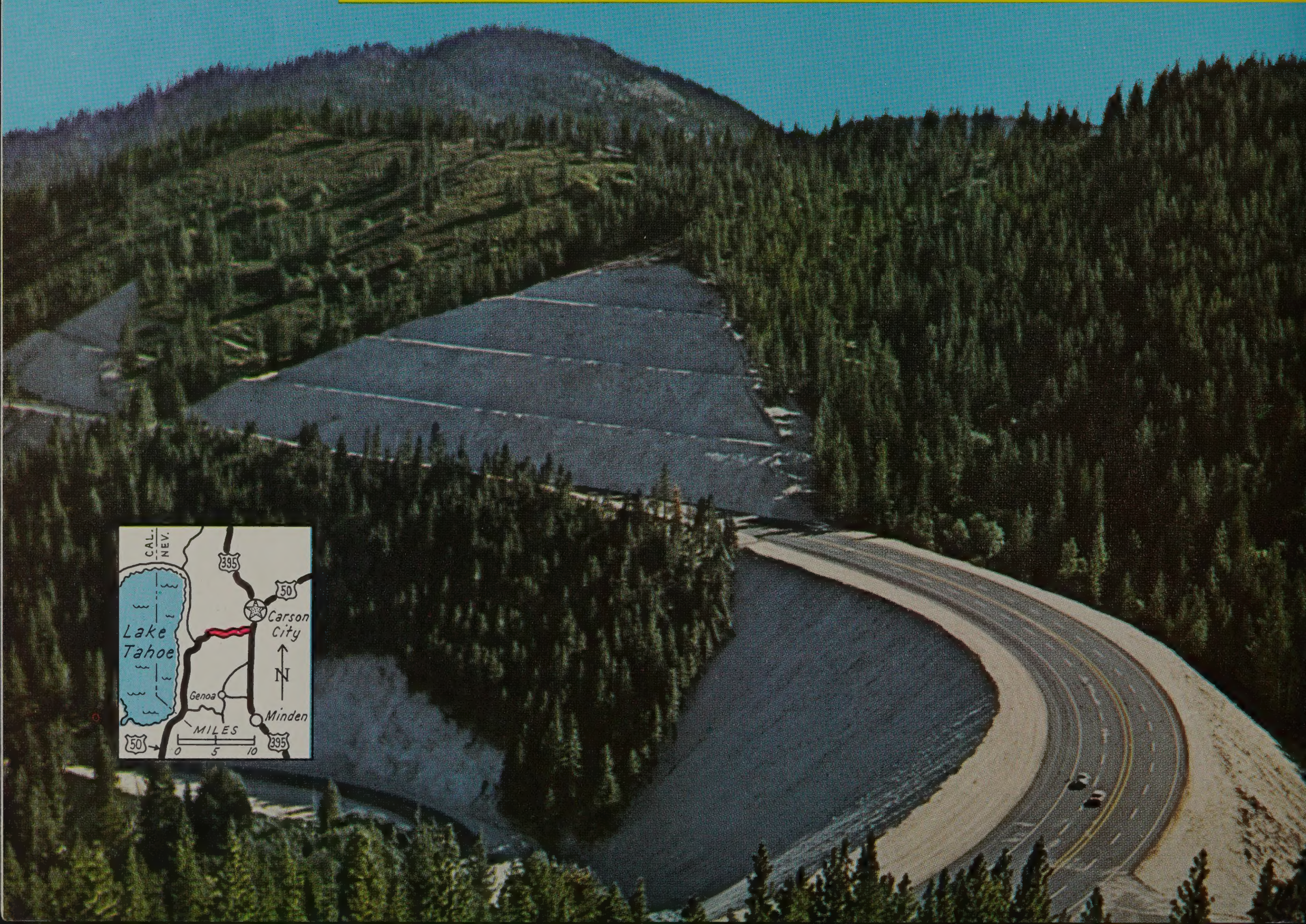
The place is awesome and spectacular. It bears a remarkable resemblance to the east face of Longs Peak and rivals that famed Colorado cirque in size and grandeur. The enclosing walls rise in great cliffs, 1,500 to 2,000 feet high, with Wheeler Peak soaring in an unbroken, almost perpendicular precipice.

Although the crest declines in altitude south of Snake Creek, those who know the country say that some of the most spectacular canyons and rock formations are in the southern part of the range. So a careful inspection of the whole area should be made before an arbitrary boundary is drawn for any proposed national park or monument. Too small an area would defeat the purpose of preserving the finest example of a Great Basin Range in its natural state as a representative type of original American wilderness.

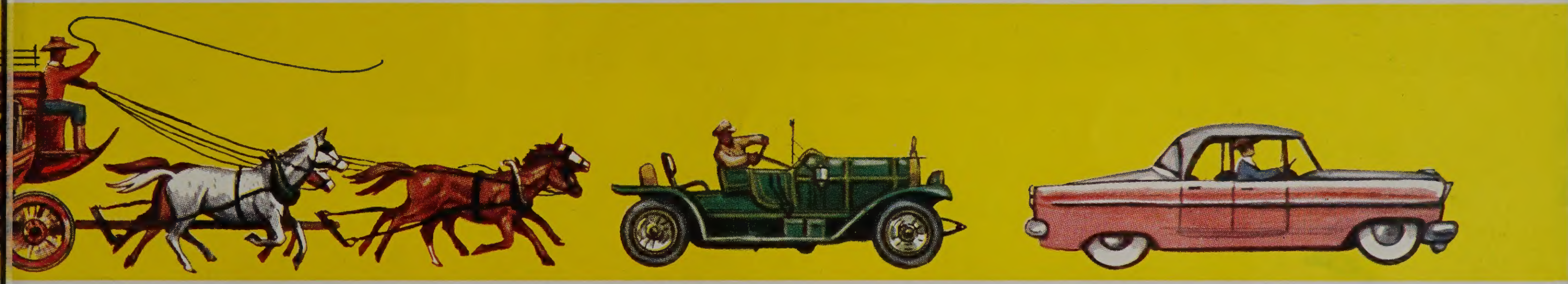
Unexpected in the midst of dry desert country are the cool woods and meadows found on Wheeler's slopes. One of its lakes is pictured on the center pages.



New Highway to the Sky...



Historic Clear Creek Grade to Lake Tahoe is Modernized



Even before it was opened to traffic last October, the new Clear Creek grade to Lake Tahoe had gained quite a reputation as a record smasher.

For one thing, its cost of more than two and a half million dollars made it the most expensive road job yet undertaken in the 40-year history of the Nevada Highway Department.

For another, the project was completed with unusual speed—in a year, almost to the day, after it was begun—several months less than the time allotted in the contract.

Then there are the statistics of the construction—the fact, for example, that more earth was moved to form the huge fills and cuts than on any previous job in Nevada or, for that matter, in many other western states. These cuts, up to 30 stories high, are the big wedges carved out of mountainsides above the new alignment. Of similar proportions are the fills or earth "bridges" carrying the highway across canyons and gullies. Construction of the new route through the Lake Tahoe foothills called for more than a dozen of these very large fills and cuts and involved the displacement of 3.5 million cubic yards of earth. One of the largest of the cuts is tiered with three benches set 60 feet apart vertically, these acting as shelves to protect the road from falling rocks.

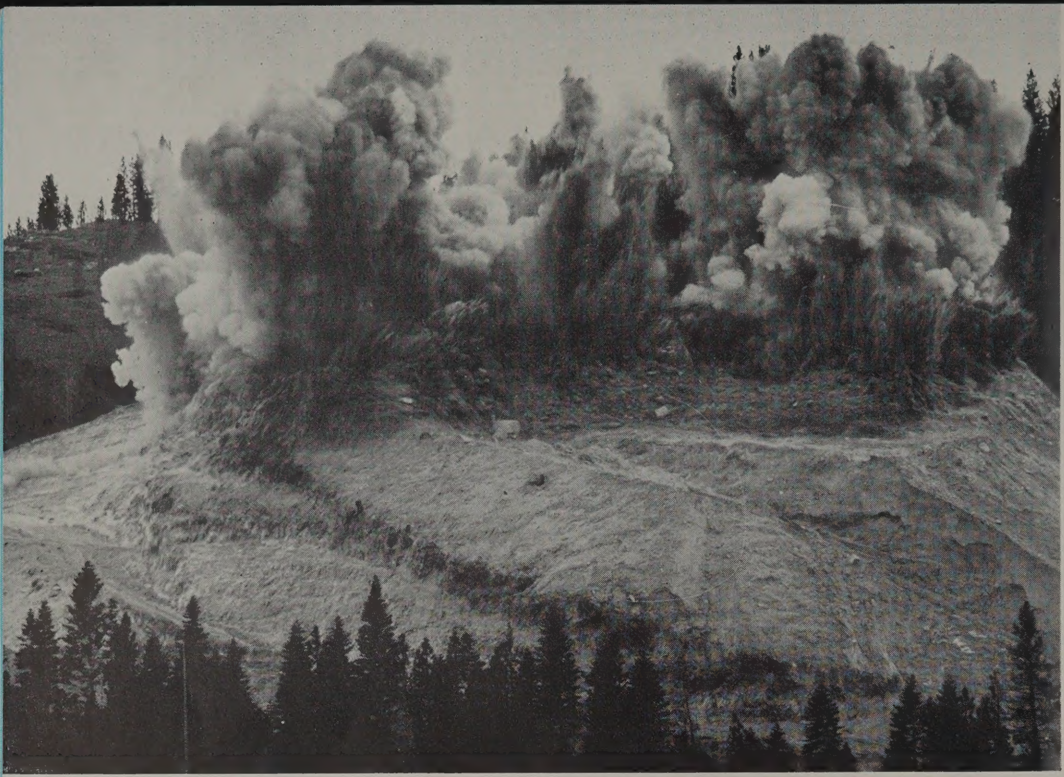
In carrying out the mammoth project, the contractor, Isbell Construction Company of Reno, threw millions of dollars' worth of equipment into the job, and kept crews working 18 hours a day. At night, huge spotlights made it possible for the heavy trucks, diesel-powered shovels and turnapulls to operate. By day, tons of explosives were set off to loosen earth which would be moved by this huge equipment. As much as 100,000 cubic yards of earth were so handled in a single week, an achievement seldom duplicated in road work.

Still another distinction may be claimed by the contractor in connection with this job. It was the Isbell firm which built the old Clear Creek grade, the first modern highway to the lake from the east, 30 years ago.

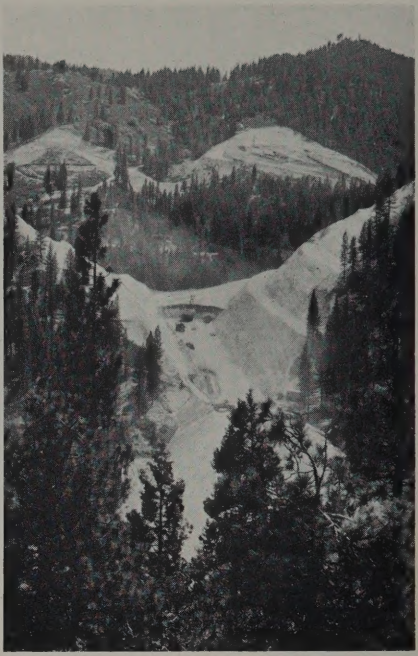
While construction statistics tell a lot about the new highway, they by no means present the whole story. The only way to really know this road is to drive it yourself, an experience you won't regret or soon forget.

The new grade begins about three miles south of Carson City, at the point where U. S. 50 turns from the valley and heads abruptly for the hills. You will recognize the new highway at once by its four lanes, generous and well-marked median strip, and by its comfortably wide shoulders.

Promise of a pleasant trip is evidenced from the



Blasting out the largest cut on the new grade. Drilling took two weeks.



A huge cut nears completion. Across top it is 600 feet wide.

Loading powder for the blast above.

A fleet of eight huge turnapulls moved tons of earth.

start. Immediately after you leave the valley, you find yourself gliding along the face of the mountains, moving effortlessly from curve into curve as you continue to climb. This is the way it will go during the entire 9-mile trip to the top at Spooners Summit.

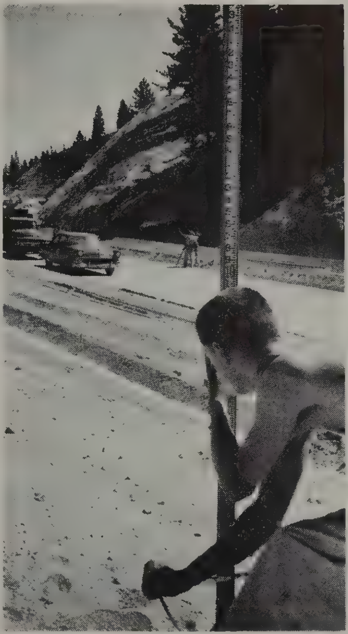
Its altitude, generally 200 feet higher than the old grade, is certainly the most interesting feature of the new alignment. From the greater heights of the road you are treated to a series of views that are little short of spectacular—glimpses of the flat Carson Valley, its ranches and the towns of Minden and Gardnerville; the Sierra Nevada giants far to the south; and the bald hills to the east.

From many parts of the new grade you catch glimpses, too, of the old Clear Creek grade, so named because it follows the banks of Clear Creek much of the way toward the summit. Twisting, curving and confined to the bottom of its canyon, the old alignment seems hopelessly antiquated from the heights of the new grade. Yet, only a year ago it was still carrying the traffic to and from the lake—carrying it, yes—but not well. Its many blind and difficult curves and its narrow, 2-lane width made passing impossible much of the time, and when there were many cars on the road traffic slowed to a 15 mile-per-hour pace or less. So frustrating was travel on the grade under these conditions that the scenery and anticipation of Lake Tahoe were completely forgotten. On the

Final clean-up after the big blast (shown at left) went off.

Modern asphalt mixers could lay a mile of surface mix in 8 hours.

All repairs were made in Isbell's field shop set up at Clear Creek.



The highway crewmen survey final grades and center line.

Work begins on the new alignment. Below is seen the old road.

new highway, four lanes keep traffic moving easily at all times and the 50 mile-per-hour speed limit still allows a much faster and safer trip than previously was possible.

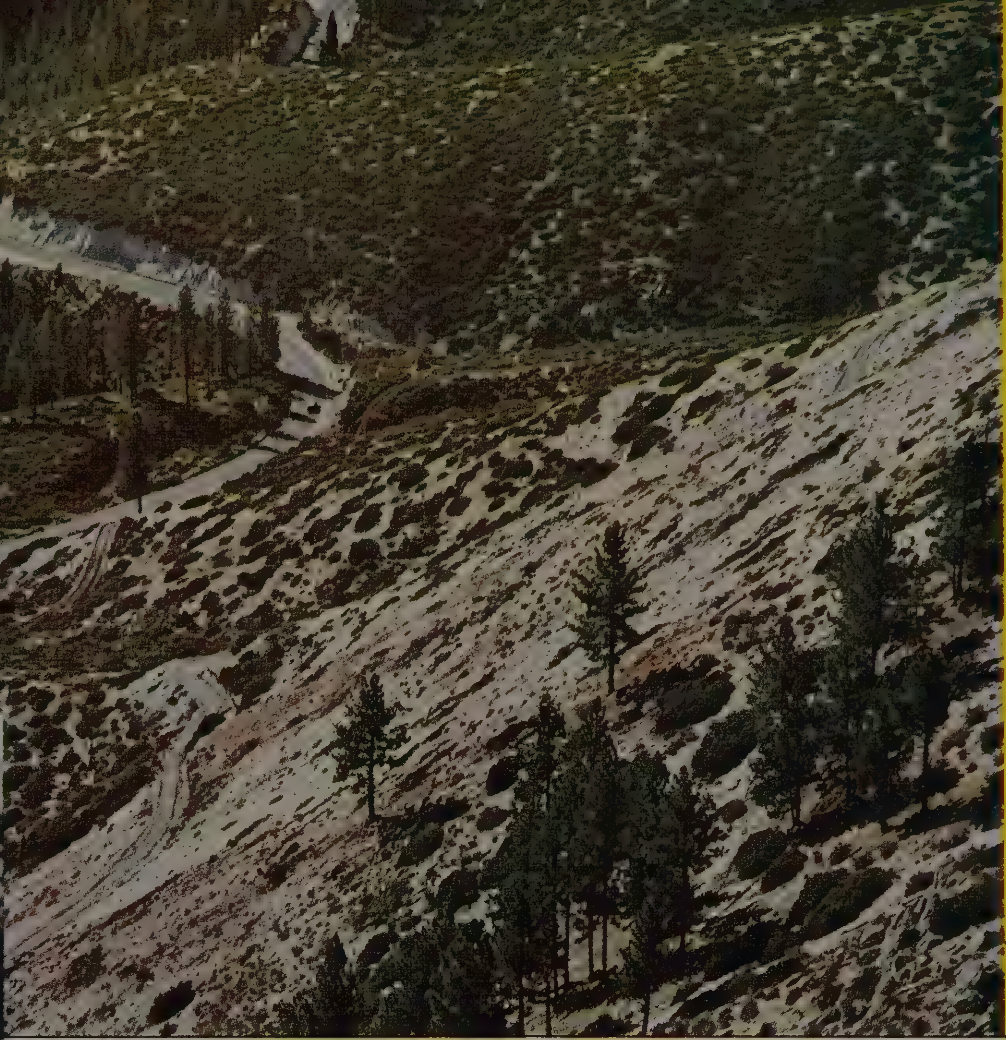
Need for the highway has long been felt. Some thirty years ago, 1929 to be exact, a 16-hour traffic count taken in July showed that only 438 cars were using the road. In a similar period last year, over 3,600 vehicles were recorded. With the great rise in travel expected due to the 1960 Winter Olympics in nearby Squaw Valley and the increasing year-around popularity of the Lake Tahoe resort area, this highway had to be built to handle the load. And handle it, it does. Traffic studies completed since the road was opened show surprising increases, partly accounted for, no doubt, by the hundreds of drivers whose only destination is pleasure. It won't surprise any of the traffic engineers to find that the new highway will soon be carrying up to 8,000 to 10,000 cars a day. From the era of covered-wagon travel, the Clear Creek highway has come a long way.

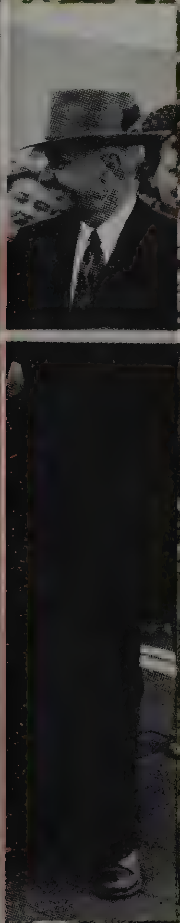
Historically, the Clear Creek road was in use before the rush began to the mines at Virginia City. It was one of the earliest trails into the Sierra but handled most traffic after lumber began to be hauled from the lake to the Comstock mines. Around the turn of the century, the Kings Canyon road immediately west of Carson City had become the best road to the lake. This was a toll road, however, and the Clear Creek road held its popularity with the so-called toll dodgers—wagon drivers who refused to pay the tolls over the Kings Canyon road.

The first paved road over the Clear Creek route, very modern for its day in view of the light traffic, was begun in 1927 and completed in 1928 at a cost of about $230,000. Several improvements followed, notably in 1931 and 1951. Total construction costs for the new and old grades and maintenance costs on the old grade add up to four million dollars, making it the most costly stretch of highway in the Nevada system.

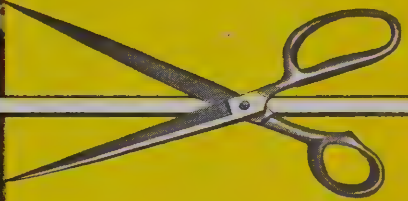
For the opening of the new highway last October 4, short but appropriate ceremonies were held. Present for the occasion were the members of the Highway Board—Governor Charles H. Russell, Attorney General Harvey Dickerson and State Controller Peter Merialdo—State Highway Engineer H. D. Mills and other highway officials. Also present were many state and county officials, representatives from chambers of commerce and city governments in California and Nevada, members of the Isbell family and—most colorful—a group of horseless carriages and passengers in costume from the Horseless Carriage Club of Reno. After a short invocation by the Reverend John L. Harvey of Carson City, Nevada's First Lady, Mrs. Charles Russell, snipped a ribbon and opened the new road over Clear Creek to traffic. A new chapter in the life of the historic old trail had officially begun.

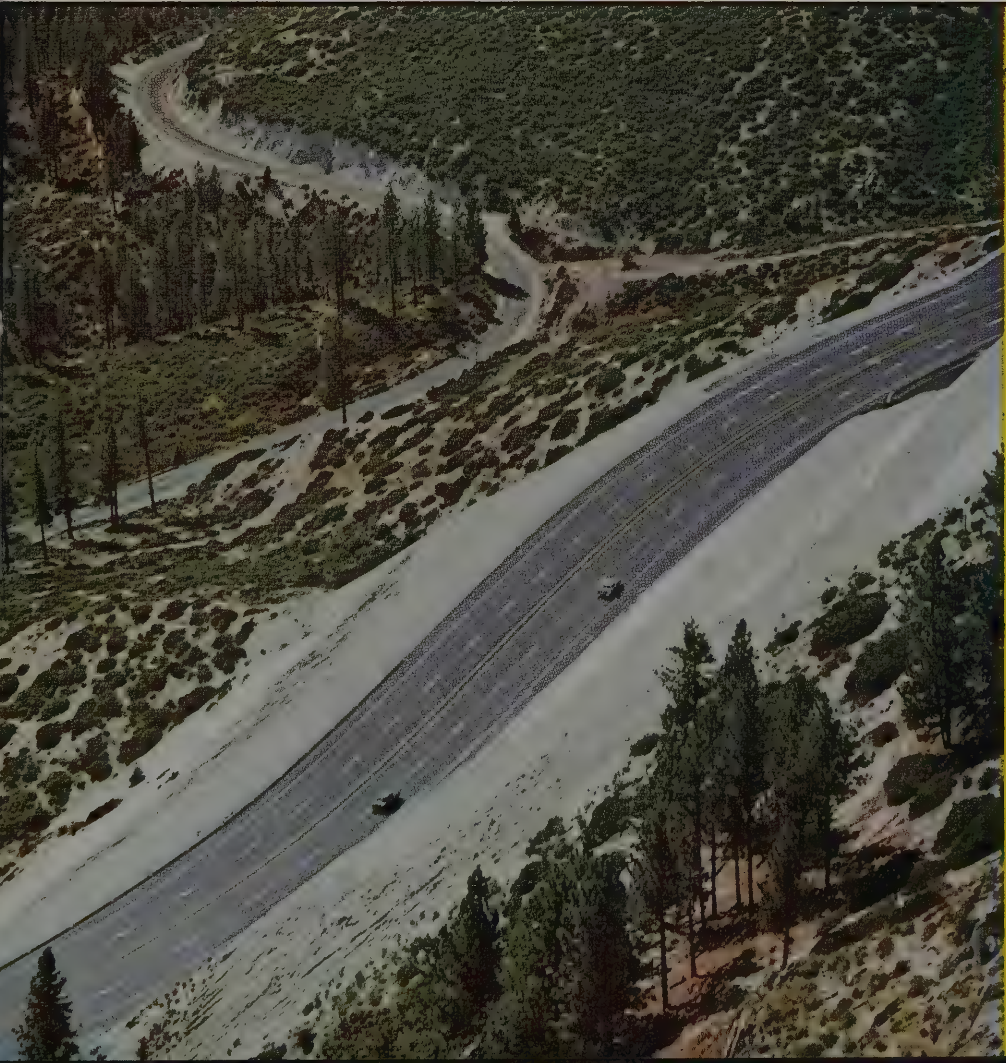
Some of the officials who came to watch or participate in the Clear Creek opening—Secretary of State John Koontz, Wilmer Isbell of the Isbell Construction Company, State Highway Engineer H. D. Mills, Attorney General Harvey Dickerson, Governor Charles H. Russell, Mrs. C. V. Isbell, Mr. C. V. Isbell, Mrs. Charles H. Russell and State Controller Peter Merialdo.





These before-and-after views of the Clear Creek project, with the old highway curving into the canyon below, show how steep is the terrain over which the new alignment passes. The first step called for the removal of all trees and underbrush from the right-of-way, an operation that took several weeks to complete.





This is the completed highway, its wide, smooth surface shown in sharp contrast to the old grade. Because several months will be needed for the earth in the big fills to settle, a hard-topped, permanent surface will be added later over the existing asphalt.

EMMA NEVADA

She left her home in Austin for the music halls of the world

Her real name was Emma Wixom and her story is as romantic and incredible as any ever written. She rose from the obscurity of a small Nevada mining community to win world-wide acclaim as Emma Nevada.

Soon after her birth in the California mining camp of Alpha Diggins on February 2, 1859, Emma and her parents joined the rush eastward to the silver boom at Austin. There her voice was recognized early by a teacher, Mrs. S. Prisk. She was also encouraged by her father, Dr. William Wallace Wixom, who instilled in Emma a self-assurance that she later combined with a beautiful voice to become world-famous.

Fortune favored the "Comstock Nightingale" many times during her career. Wealthy friends in Austin sent her to Mills Seminary in California to study music. While there, a professor, Dr. Adrian Ebell, and his wife were impressed with her talent and took her to Paris to study voice in 1877.

As a pupil of the noted Madame Marchesi, Emma progressed rapidly. Unfortunately, Dr. Ebell died and his wife returned to America, leaving Emma without funds to continue her studies. But fortune smiled again as friends in Nevada and California learned of her plight and sent the necessary money.

Showing pride in her background, Emma changed her name to Nevada just before her London debut in 1880. From that night on, Europe was hers.

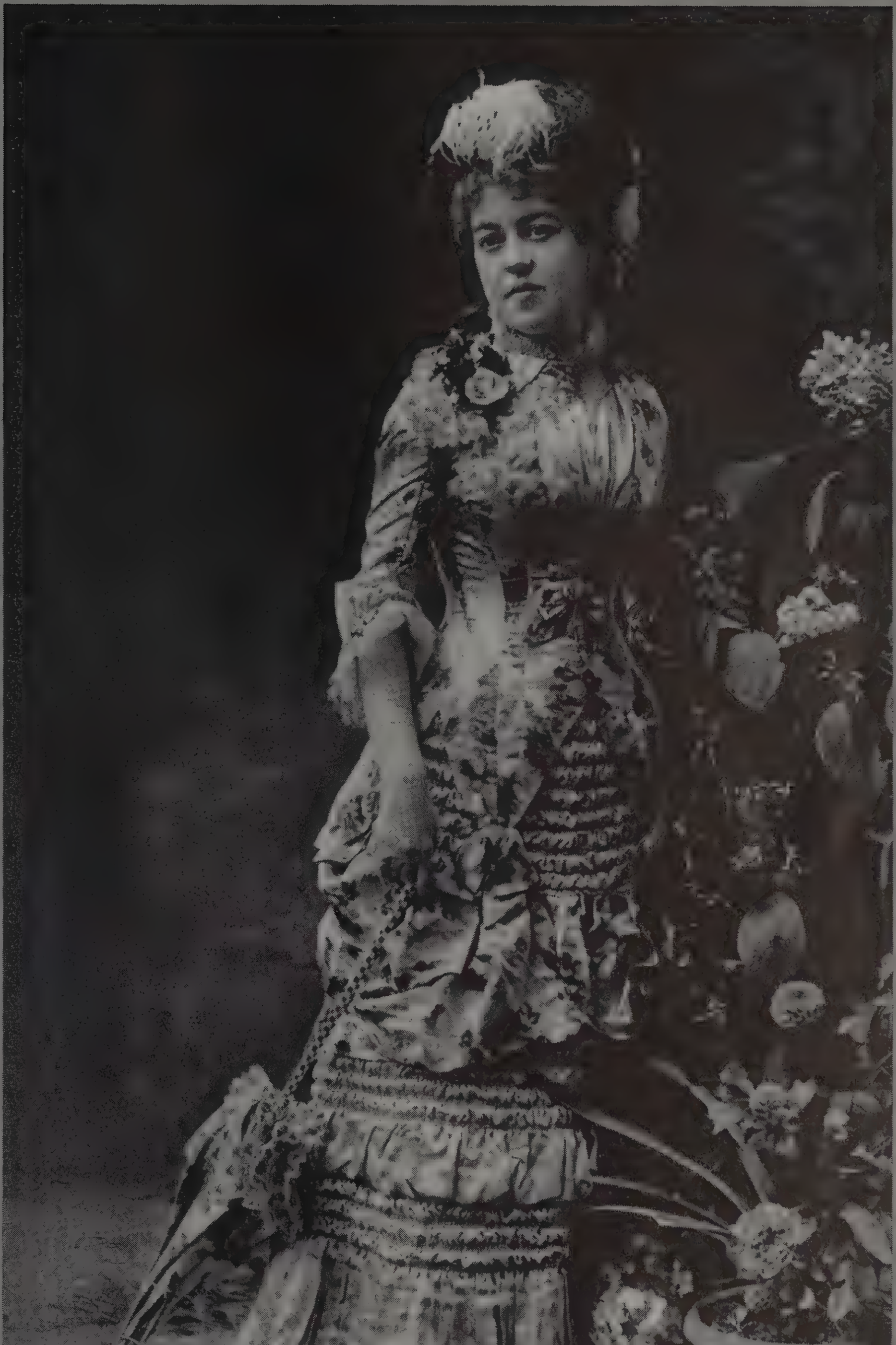
In the spring of 1885, she began her first American tour. She appeared at San Francisco's Grand Opera House on the evening of March 23, and the next morning's papers reported "enthusiasm bordering on lunacy," in response to her debut.

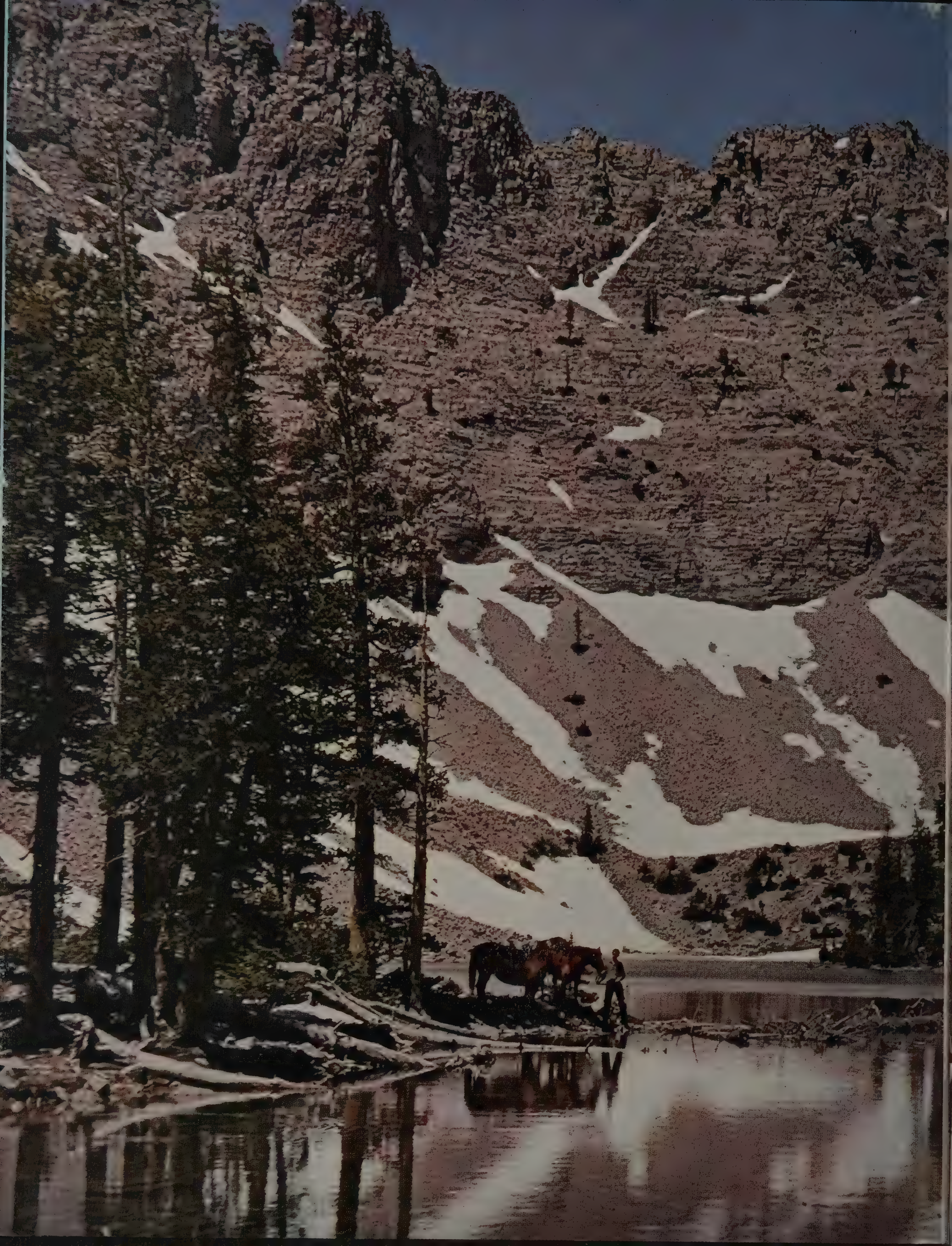
She had become the idol of two continents. Her manager, Dr. Raymond Palmer, too, fell victim to her charm and they were married that same year.

Following her American debut, she returned many times to sing in the mining towns of her childhood. Though she had received praise even from Queen Victoria, Emma remained unaffected by her success.

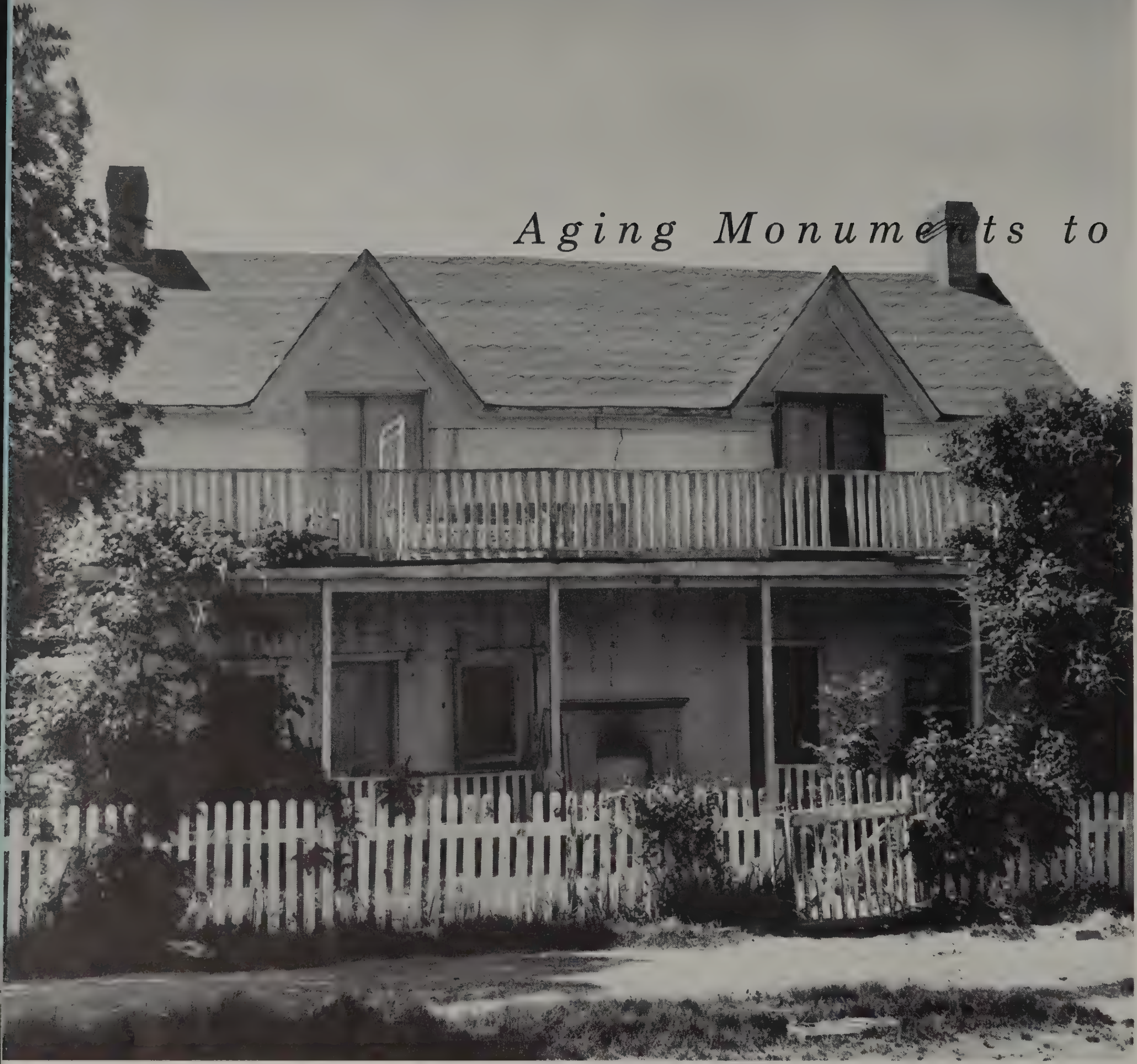
In 1902 she gave her last American concert in Nevada City near the place of her birth, and soon afterwards ended her professional career and retired to private life. Emma died near Liverpool, England in 1940. But her simple charm and glorious voice brought a pride to Nevadans that won't be forgotten.

Photos courtesy of Nevada State Historical Society.

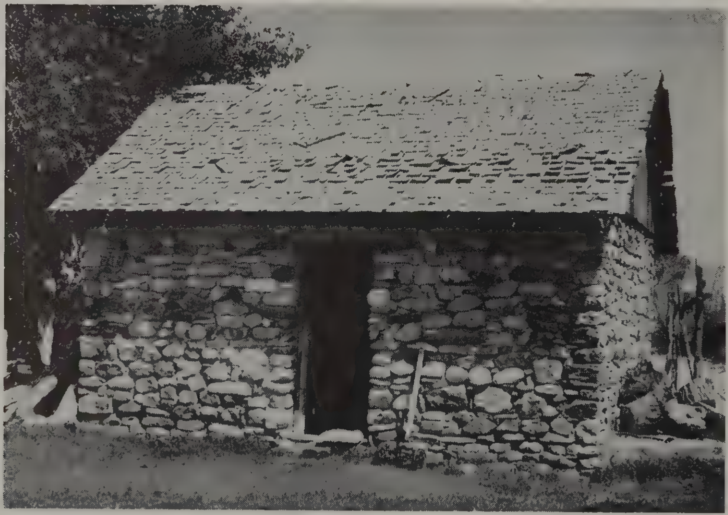




Aging Monuments to Mormon



Comfortably large and of the same simple design as other early homes in Bunkerville, this house was built by Edward Bunker, Jr., oldest son of the Bishop.



Rocks from the nearby hills went into this granary which was built by Albert Hafen 50 years ago. Opposite page, the ruins of a very early adobe cabin built by another of Bishop Bunker's sons, Stephen.

Pioneers in Nevada . . . the

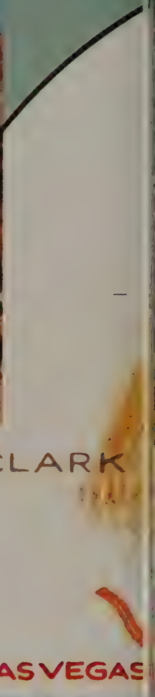
OLD HOUSES AT BUNKERVILLE

Time has moved slowly in Bunkerville. An earlier, less complicated way of life is suggested by the quiet, shady streets of the town, by the surrounding green fields, and by the many interesting old houses which remain there.

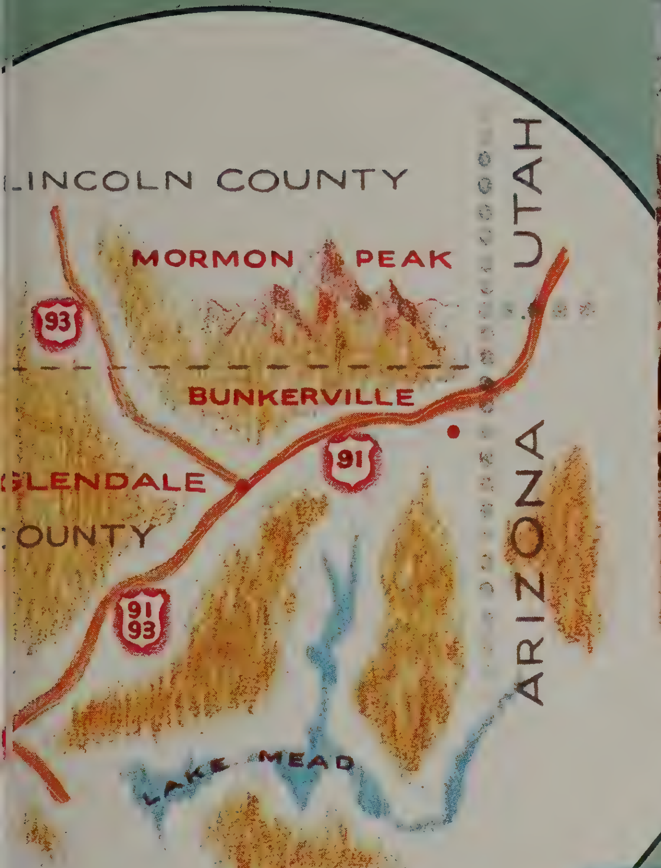
These old houses—dignified, austere and sturdy—were put up by the dedicated Mormon farmers who first settled the valley of the Virgin River some 75 years ago. The houses will remain for many years to come—monuments to the pioneers who built them and to the vigorous chapter in American history they represent.

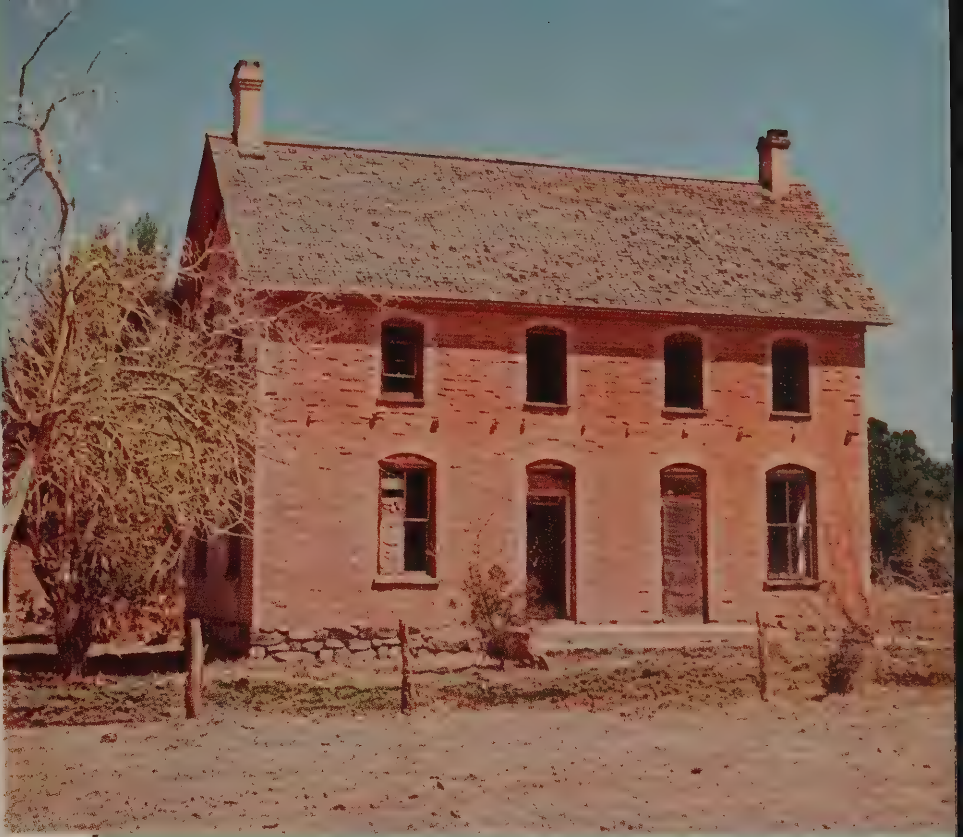
Mormon colonists came from the Utah Territory to the Virgin River in southern Nevada in 1877. That year, under the leadership of Bishop Edward Bunker, a group of 23 men and women left their homes in Utah with the determination to tame the muddy, often rampaging, Virgin River and to set up new homes along its banks.

This migration followed a pattern set by the Mormons earlier last century. In advance of the first large waves of population to the West, they had journeyed by wagon train to settle in Utah and to strengthen their church. Then, from their capital at Salt Lake City, small groups of colonists had penetrated into the far corners of the West, winning the respect of later travelers for their knowledge of the trails and passes. The Mormons

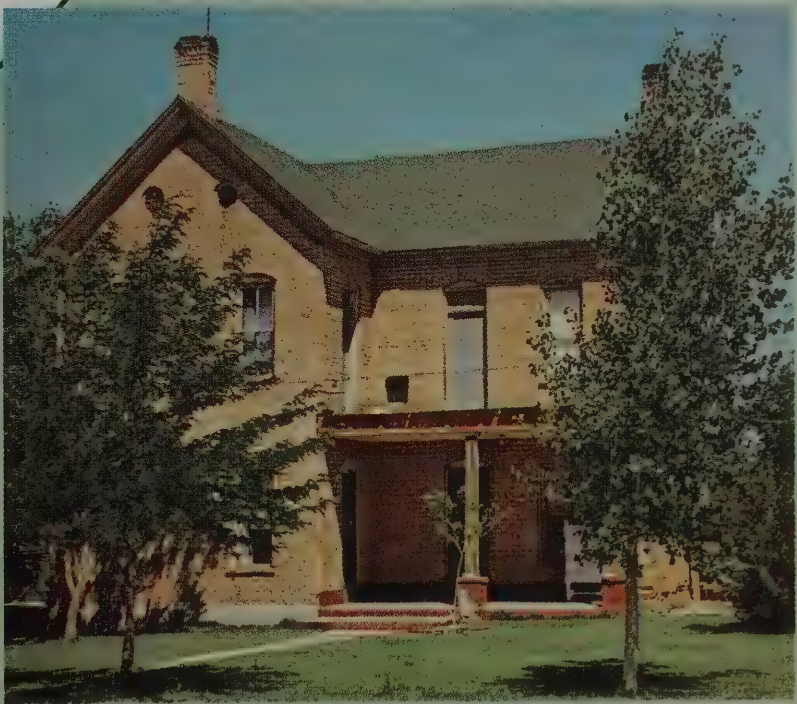


Settled by 23 Mormon colonists in 1877, Bunkerville in its setting of green fields has changed little in past decades. The town lies just over the rim of the Great Basin near the Virgin River. Above, the cliffs north of town; below, the Latter Day Saints Church is a graceful new building. Electricity came with Hoover Dam, bringing a new way of life.

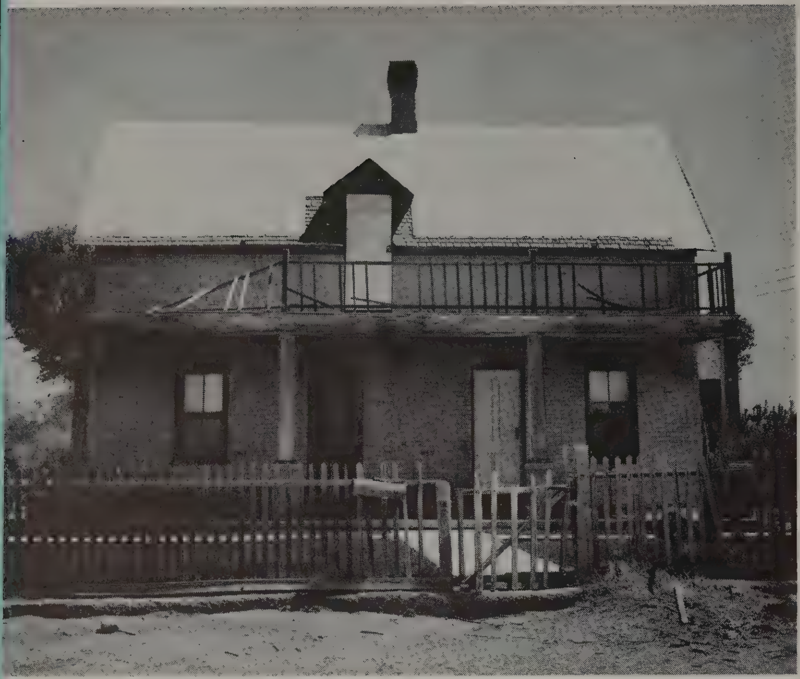




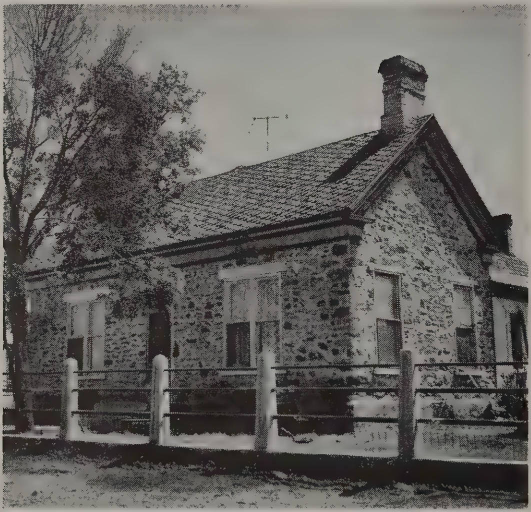
Although unused for a number of years, the Frank Leavitt house is still as sturdy as when it was built by Mormon craftsmen before the turn of the century.



Brick for Bunkerville's houses was made in a kiln near the present town. The houses, like the two pictured here, are dignified and unadorned. The same simple architecture is found in other Mormon settlements in Utah and eastern Nevada.



Some of Bunkerville's houses, like the one above which Heber Hardy built at about the turn of the century, are showing signs of age but their lines are trim as when they first went up.



Constructed by stonemason Peter Iverson in 1893, this strong old house has the modern addition of television. Electricity was brought in after Hoover Dam was finished and made things much easier for Bunkerville's families.

were established in California before gold was even thought of. They were farming the rich valleys of western Nevada when the Forty-Niners arrived and one of their trading posts, Mormon Station—later called Genoa, was the first permanent settlement in the state.

When Bishop Bunker was called upon to set up the Nevada colony that would bear his name, he was ready. He was an able leader and, like the other Mormon founders of Utah, well versed in the ways of the frontier.

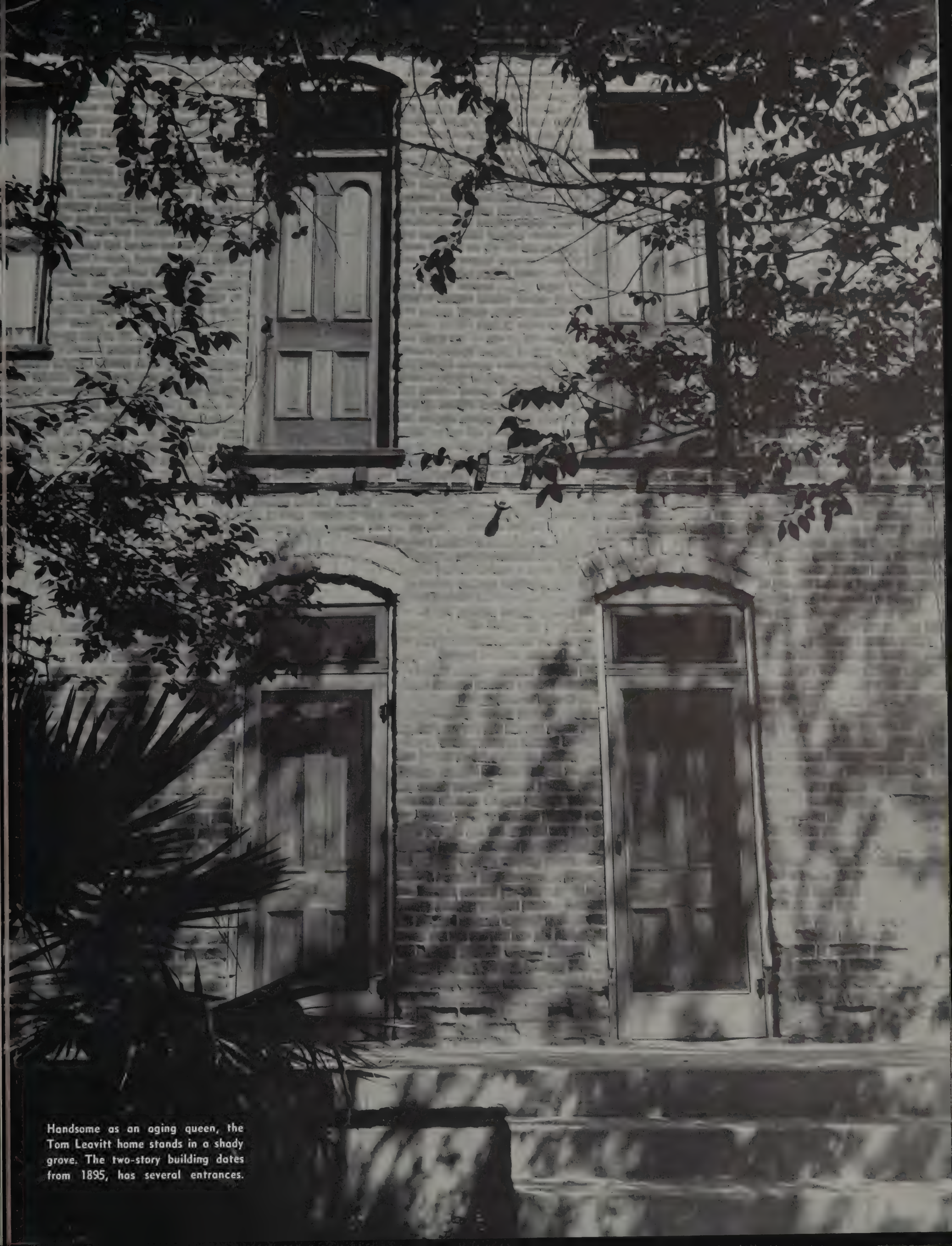
Still, the Bunker party faced terrible hardships in their early years in Nevada, living in tents or crude cabins and struggling to exist on the first sparse harvests. To obtain water for their crops, they had to dig a canal seven miles long from the river to the dormant farmland lower down along the channel. Through backbreaking days of toil, using only the simplest of implements, they plowed, dug ditches and planted. Meanwhile, they searched for ways to purify the river water for drinking and to rid themselves of the mosquito nuisance.

They had to battle against the river, that silty, slumbering stream that dried almost to a trickle in midsummer, then rose to a pounding, angry torrent in the spring when the snows melted. In 1878 and many times later, flash floods roared in to wipe out crops and to ruin the fields for the season. After each new encounter with the river, the defiant colonists would again rebuild the canal and dam, and relevel and replant. Then they would joke about the unseemly behavior of this river called the Virgin.

In spite of hardships such as these, the community prospered. The fertile land responded generously to the Mormon plow and within a few seasons was providing ample food for the original settlers and the families who had joined them. They raised vegetables, grains of several kinds, cotton and sugar cane. They successfully tried sun-loving plants—figs, pomegranates, grapes and almonds. They built a cotton gin and flour mill and then, after the land had been conquered, turned to building for themselves. In the 1880's a brickkiln was set up near the town and the stonemasons, bricklayers and carpenters left the fields to build the homes that are seen today.

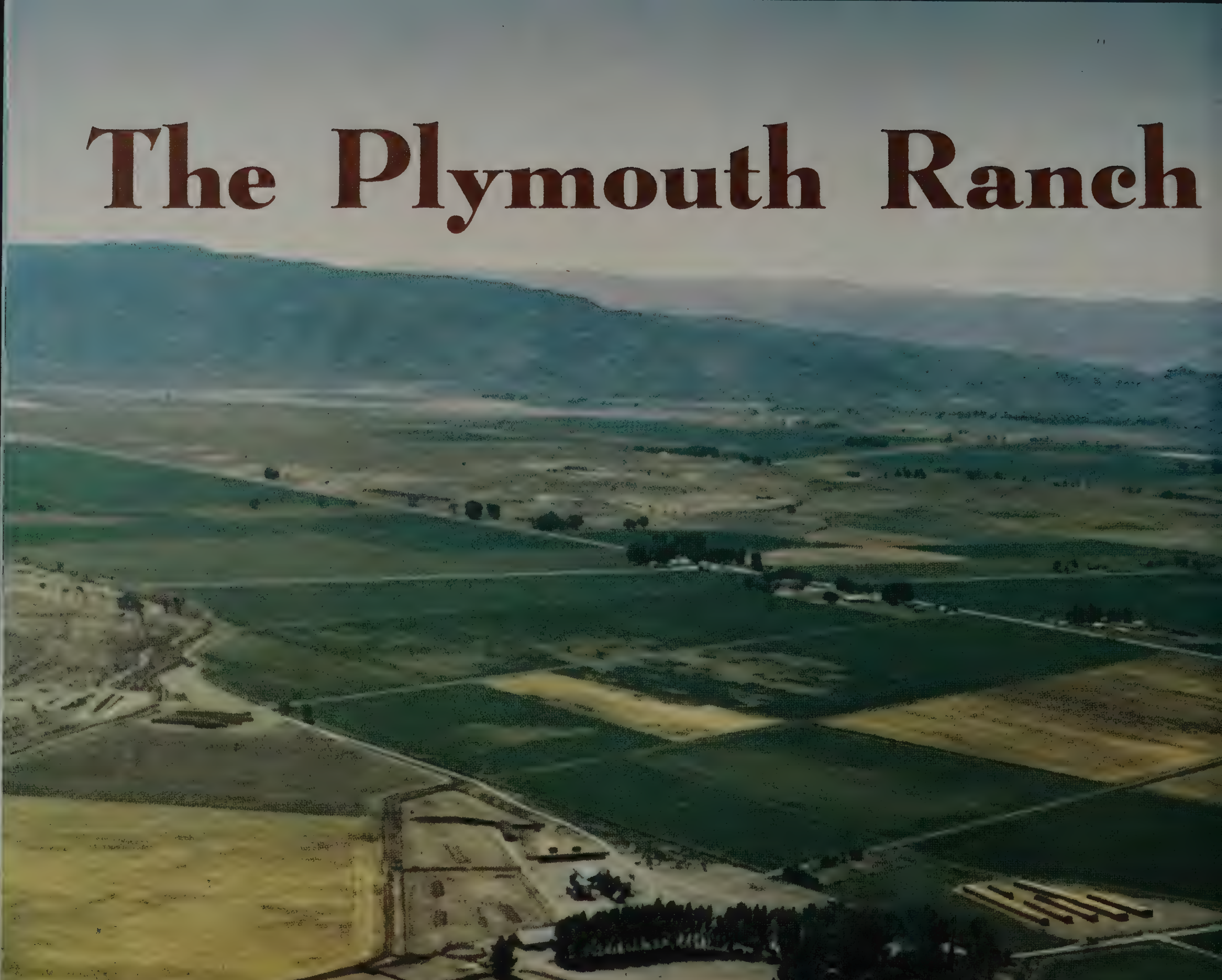
Although it has not grown much in population, Bunkerville in later years sent out many of its families to settle the farming towns like Moapa, Glendale, and Logandale in the nearby valleys. Names of these early settlers—Bunker, Abbott, Leavitt, Cox, Earl and Hafen, to name a few—are now familiar in all parts of southern Nevada.

Today, modern roads lead into Bunkerville and power lines from Hoover Dam have taken their place on the skyline. There are many new homes and a trim, new L.D.S. Church which was built in 1951. But the old homes remain as mementos of earlier days in this pioneer agricultural center.



Handsome as an aging queen, the Tom Leavitt home stands in a shady grove. The two-story building dates from 1895, has several entrances.

The Plymouth Ranch



Air view of the sprawling Plymouth Ranch (foreground) in Smith Valley. Sierra Nevadas are seen in the distance.

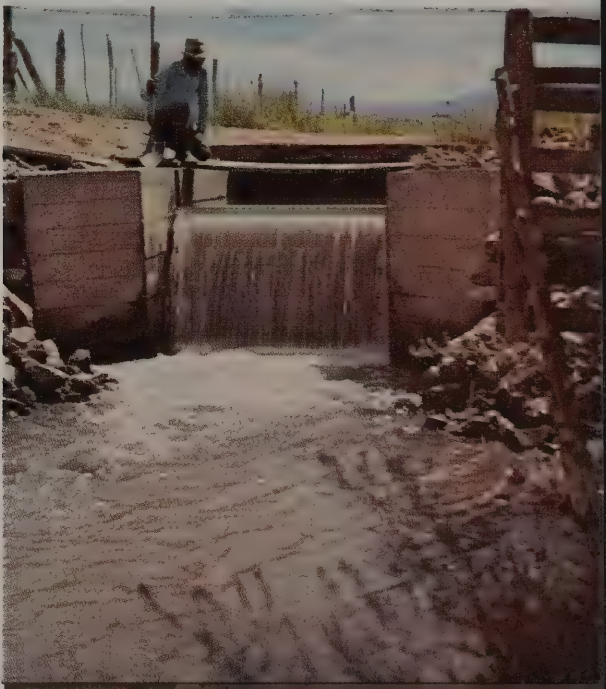
in Smith Valley

Built up over the years, it runs like a modern factory

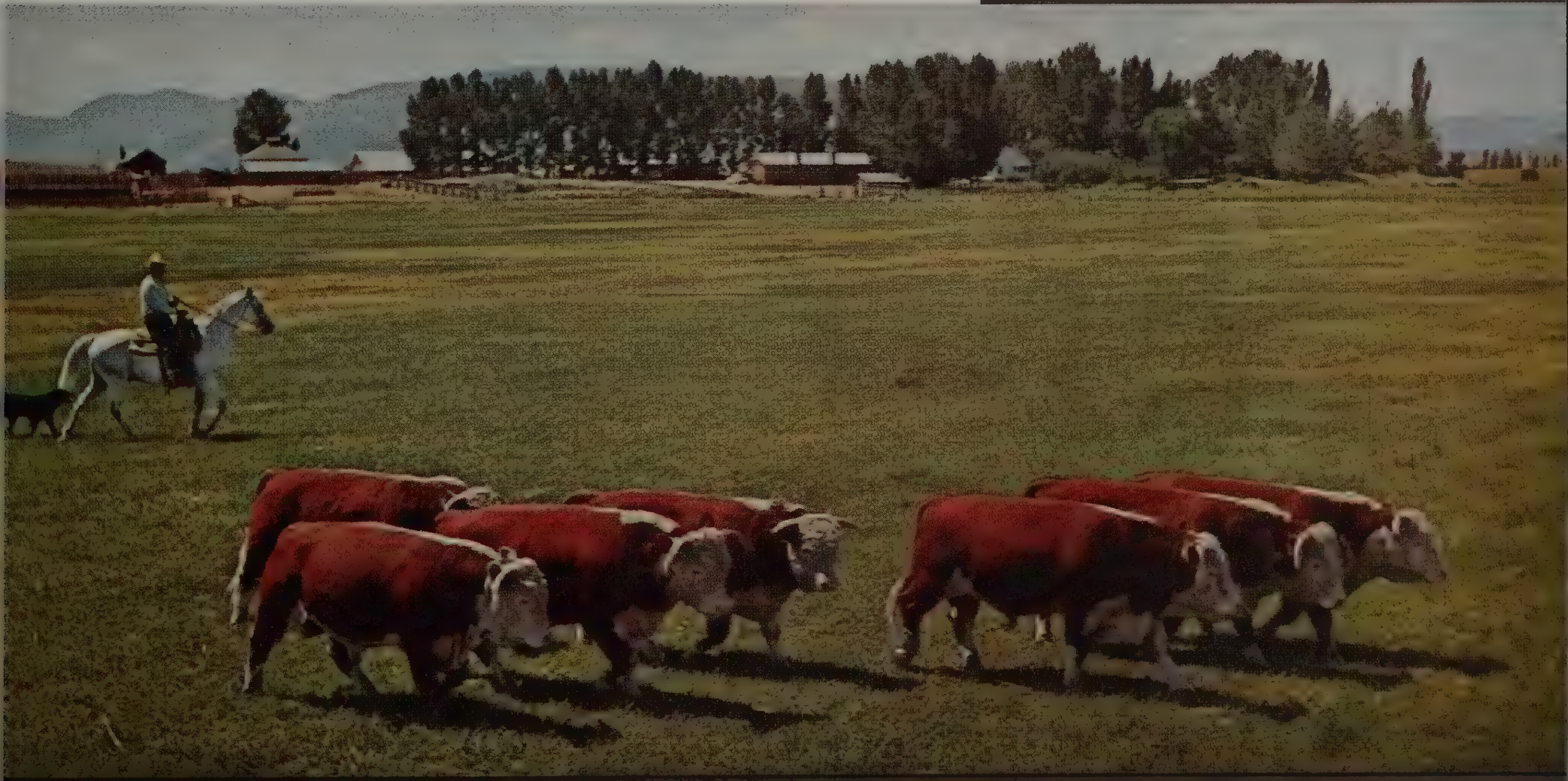
As he cast an appreciative eye over the land surrounding him, the man who runs this 3,000-acre cattle ranch commented, "It's quite a spread, and most of the land you can see from here at the house is a part of our property."

It was a matter-of-fact statement, but pride of ownership showed through as Norman Brown described the ranch—a completely modern plant which produces some thousand head of Hereford cattle annually. And as he talked, it became easier to understand the operation—mechanized and efficient beef production in which the concept of cowboys on horseback plays only a minor role.

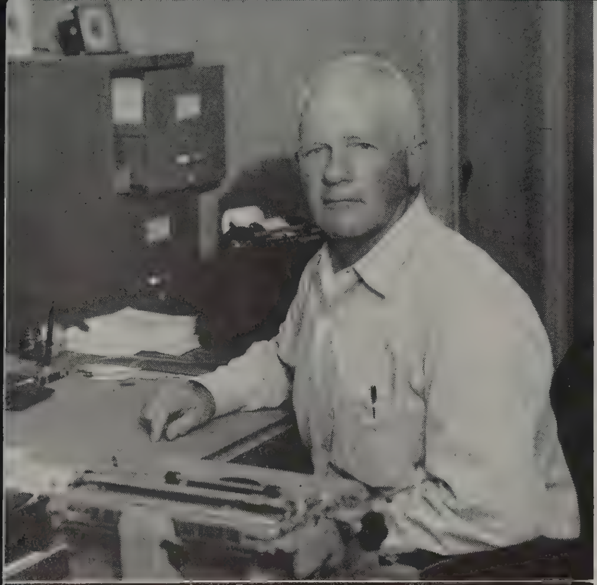
"The cattle, themselves, are only a part of the picture," our host explained, "since to fatten them for marketing we also raise a thousand acres of alfalfa, a couple hundred acres of grain and forty acres of corn, all of which is turned into winter feed for the cattle."



Water—lifeblood of the ranch.



Norman Brown directs all operations of the 3,000-acre ranch. Here, he inspects his herd of prize Hereford bulls.



The paper work is done in Brown's modern ranch office. Ranching is now big business.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown enjoy a mid-morning cup of coffee in their up-to-date kitchen.

Brown's son-in-law, Robert Compston, is associated with the family-operated ranch.

He then pointed out his feed mill where the alfalfa, barley, oats and wheat are ground and stored until they are mixed for use during the fall-to-spring feeding.

As we accompanied the rancher from the house toward the fields, we saw the first of the thousands of dollars' worth of modern farm machinery used on the ranch. A hired summer crew was running a large baler through a field of recently cut alfalfa. Attached to the machine was a flat-bed wagon onto which neatly wired bales were being stacked while an empty wagon awaited its turn to be filled.

Like many ranchers in prosperous Smith Valley, Brown uses not only the best in modern machinery, but also the latest in farming and ranching methods. Thousands of dollars are spent each year on chemical insecticides and fertilizers. The alfalfa, a Lahontan strain developed by Dr. Oliver Smith of the University of Nevada, gives a high yield and is resistant to many of the bacterial and parasitic diseases that affect plants in this region. Crops are rotated every five to ten years to help insure a good, healthy yield, with potatoes and onions replacing the alfalfa for two or three seasons to remove traces of the old stand that might carry over plant diseases.

Another important aspect of the summer operation was revealed as Brown showed us a huge silage pit in the southeast corner of the ranch. Several weeks later the deep trench would be filled with shredded corn, stalk and all, and left to ferment for later use as winter silage.

While we walked along the edge of the pit, the rancher described the process. "The corn's chopped up fine when it's cut in the field; then a truck brings it down here to the pit where it's dumped in, wet, and mashed down by the roller you see on the bank over there. We cover it over when the pit is filled and let it ferment for a few months before feeding it to the cattle."

On the way back to the ranch house, Brown invited us to see his prize herd of Hereford breeding bulls in the north pasture.

Before going over we stopped by the barn, and while he saddled his horse he told us about the huge brick structure. It had been built about forty years ago to house the fifty horses which were used on the ranch before the machines took over. "In those days," Brown added, "the ranch had a crew of several dozen men and everything we needed was grown or made right here."

As we started for the north pasture, Butch, the rancher's sheep dog, came running up to join the party. Running alongside his master's horse, Butch was all that was needed to complete this typical western picture of cattle, mountains, the rancher and his dog.

The urgent ring of the noon dinner-bell brought a quick end to our interest in the breeding stock and we returned to the house. Before we sat down to the king-sized meal of roast beef we shared with the crew, Brown showed us through the rambling 70-year-old home. He told us that many changes had been made in the original structure and that even now the eight-room, two-story house was being remodeled and enlarged for a new kitchen and living room.

As we relaxed after the meal, the conversation turned to the history of the ranch and our host gave us the details.

Surrounded by lawns and immense old poplar trees, the Browns' home is one of the most attractive in Smith Valley. Mrs. Brown planned recent modernization of the old house which has been part of the ranch for some 70 years.

Most popular person on the ranch—undoubtedly the cook! Feeding ten or more is a big job.

Crewmen gobble up a huge noon meal, then relax at the bunkhouse before returning to the fields. Several are saving wages for school.

This large mower devours an alfalfa field in short order. Three crops per summer are grown.

Smaller patches of alfalfa along ditch banks and edges of fields are handled by this mower.

After hay is mowed and dried, it is baled by this fast machine. Bales are then loaded on wagons.

Corn stalks are cut, chopped and hauled to the silage pit. It makes a fine supplemental feed.

Corn is compressed into silage pit for winter storage. Feed is taken from pit as it is needed.

A steady stream of corn spouts from chopper. Trucks follow the chopper to pick up the load.

"The Plymouth Ranch, as our place is called by most people, was originally owned by the Hudson family who settled here in the 1870's. Near the north end of the ranch the old Nevada Copper Belt Railroad once had a depot and water-stop named after the Hudsons.

"In the Eighties, the Simpsons bought the property and hauled in the present ranch house which they located first near the west end of the ranch, then later moved to its present site. John O'Banion purchased the land in the early 1900's but sold out to my father-in-law, William Dressler, and several partners a few years later."

Both Norman Brown and his wife had grandparents who were early Nevada settlers. His grandfather, Lawrence Frey, was a pioneer rancher near Genoa in the late 1850's. Mrs. Brown's family, the Dresslers, settled in Carson Valley in the Sixties. Brown was born and raised in Gardnerville and met his wife while attending high school there.

"Things have really changed since then," he continued. "We used to raise everything we ate, including vegetables, hogs, chickens, fruit—even raised sheep for awhile and grazed them in the Pine Nut Range northwest of here. We had our own dairy herd and at one time milked nearly a hundred Holsteins. We took the surplus milk into Minden for making cheese and butter. Used to do all our own slaughtering, too."

That afternoon we completed our first visit to the Plymouth Ranch with a tour of the irrigation system that supplies the land with its lifeblood—water. Brown pointed out that all the fields under cultivation must be irrigated to compensate for the sparse rainfall that's typical of Nevada's climate.

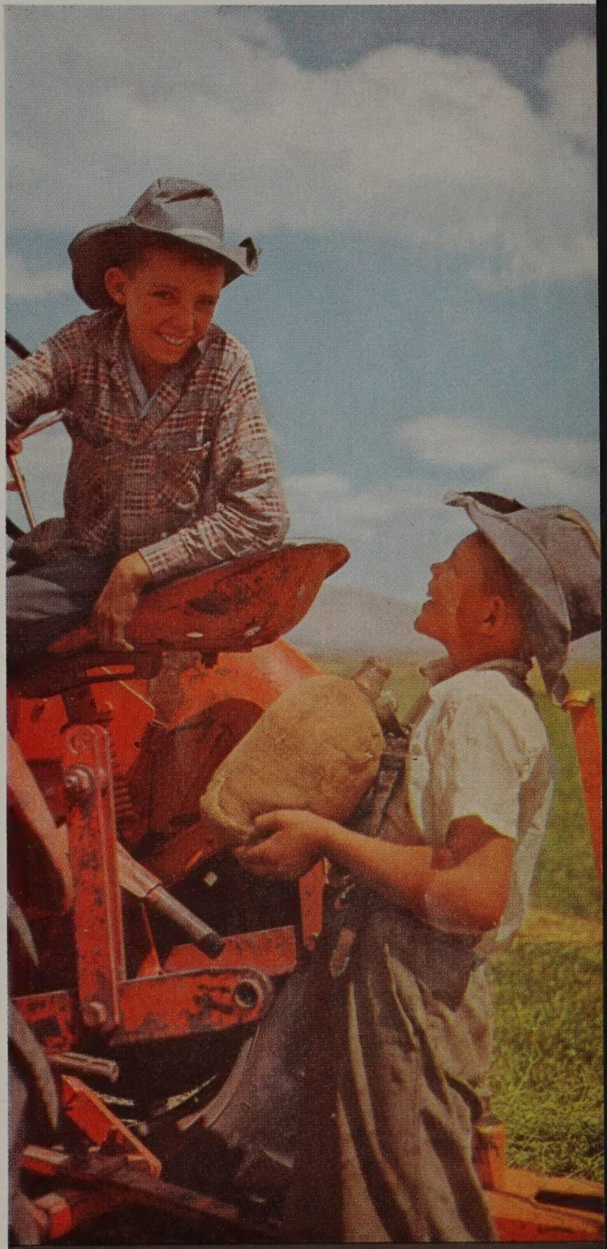
Smith Valley ranchers are fortunate in that the Walker River flows nearby, providing ample water for the rich farmland of the area. But irrigation from the Walker is carefully regulated by the Walker River Irrigation District. As a member of the district, Brown diverts what water he needs and distributes it through his fields by means of small earthen canals and ditches. The Plymouth Ranch is doubly fortunate in having several artesian wells which are used for household water and some irrigating.

We returned to the ranch on two other occasions—once to watch the corn harvest and later to see the unloading of cattle brought in from summer range in the mountains above Bridgeport, California.

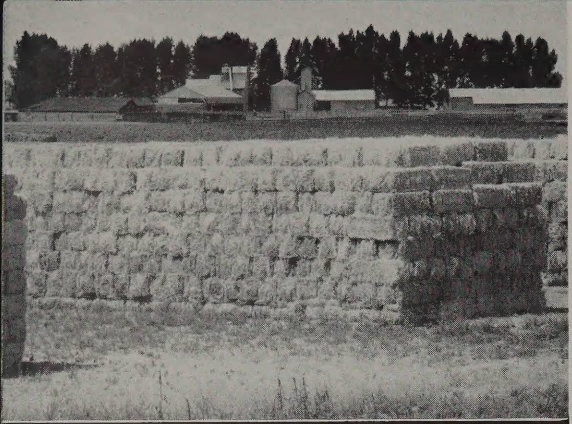
Though most of the ranch's stock is herded along a 60-mile trail to and from summer pasture, several hundred head are also transported by truck. During our last visit, about 150 steers were brought up from Bridgeport in a huge diesel rig and unloaded in the weighing pens east of the house.

Though the ranch uses modern machinery to a great extent, Brown told us the cowhand and his dog still play a vital role in handling the cattle. On the drives out and back and during summer grazing, the dog, horse and cowman are indispensable.

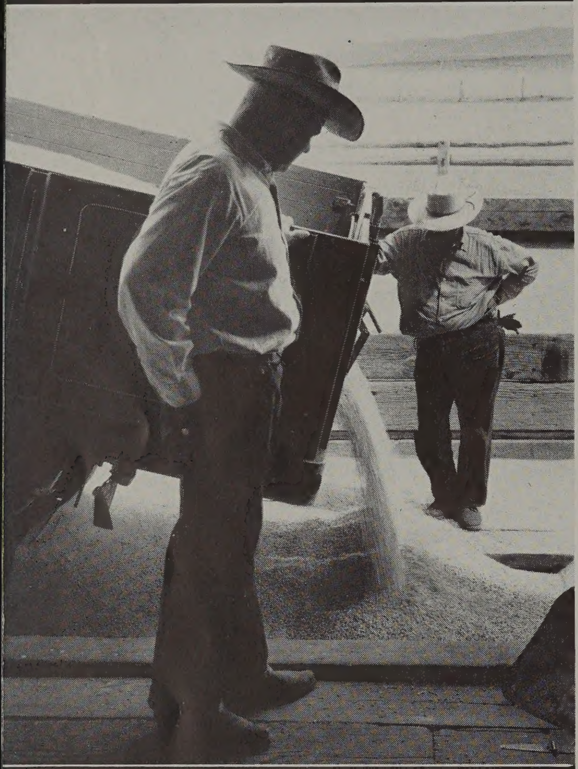
The rest of the herd had already been set out in the large feeding pens north of the barn and unloading area. Here, hundreds of young Herefords were being fattened on silage, alfalfa and grain for the spring market.



Young but strong, these neighbor boys help with the hay every year.



Results of the summer's work—thousands of bales of hay stacked for winter feed.



Norman Brown watches as storage bins are filled with grain—good winter feed.

Brown said the cattle came off the summer range weighing four to five hundred pounds and doubled their weight during the winter feeding. "They have to eat about thirty pounds of mixed feed for every three pounds of weight gained. They're also given chemical food supplements and the usual medicines to keep them healthy," he added.

The size of the Plymouth operation became strikingly evident when we figured out that the ranch's thousand head of cattle, when ready for market, would represent a million pounds of beef, on the hoof.

Before we ended our visit we were shown a small building near the ranch house that Brown used as an office. And inside, the modern efficiency of his cattle raising was evident from the businesslike, work-filled desk to the grey filing cabinets.

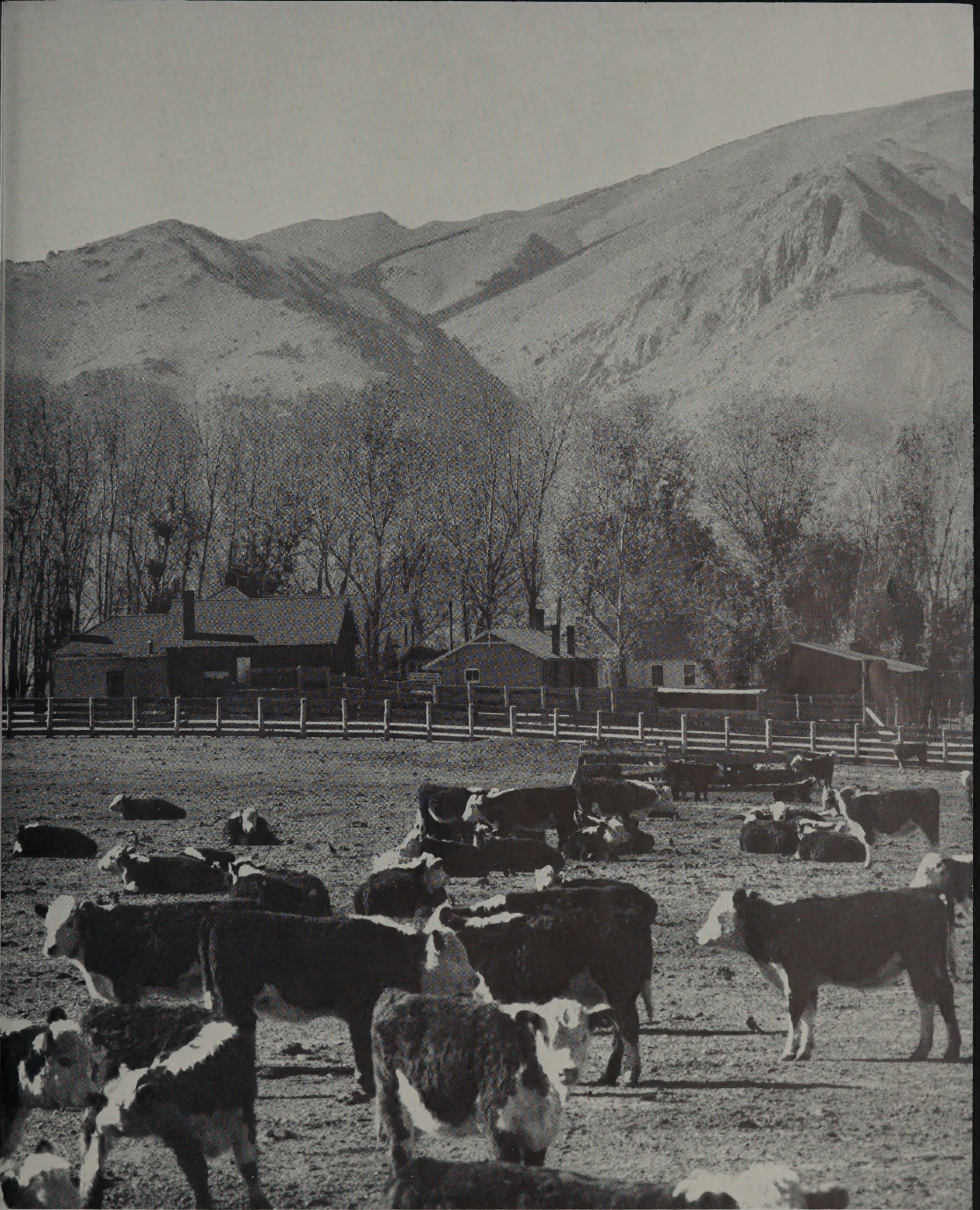
The room also gave evidence of another side of this busy rancher—that of community and civic leader. The many certificates that lined the walls testified to the varied activities of our host. Glancing at these, we saw that Brown is a member of two state government commissions, an officer and member in several cattle associations, and active in local civic and governmental groups.

Until recently he was a member and had been chairman of the Smith Valley School Board on which he served for 23 years. The land on which Smith Valley schools are built was ranch land given to the school district by the Brown family.

Today, some 35 years after the Browns came to Smith Valley, the Plymouth Ranch has grown with the family from a horse-and-plow operation into a streamlined, mechanized plant for producing beef cattle. This efficient business, now operated as a corporation, also includes the Brown's two daughters, their husbands, Emmett Day and Bob Compston and their four children.

Yet, in spite of all this growth and modernization, the real moving force behind the Plymouth Ranch remains the rugged individualism and pride of ownership and accomplishment exemplified by the Brown family.

After summer in the mountains, these healthy young cattle are fattened for market during the winter.



The end product—beef cattle. Some one million pounds are marketed yearly by the Plymouth Ranch.

The new Clear Creek Highway—See story on page 8.